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and they consequently form no exception to the views which we have advanced.

In this article we have confined our attention to the state of pure mathematics in Scotland. In chemistry, and in experimental philosophy in general, that country holds a far more respectable rank. Since the important discoveries of Black, whom we may regard as our townsman, great attention has been paid to these subjects in Scotland; and the same laudable spirit of inquiry is in successful operation at the present time. It is from his labours in this field of investigation, that Professor Leslie has derived the character which he enjoys. His discoveries in experimental philosophy have justly caused him to be regarded as a man of original talents; and have gained him a reputation, which his mathematical writings have perhaps tended to diminish, but by no means to increase.

In our next number, we shall notice some of the late scientific publications in Ireland, and shall take occasion to offer some remarks on the state of science in this country.

#### ON IRISH POOR LAWS.

TO HENRY GRATTAN, ESQ. M. P.

ON HIS PROPOSAL, MADE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, UPON THE 22D INSTANT, TO INTRODUCE A MODIFICATION OF THE POOR LAWS, INTO IRELAND.

*BELFAST, March 30, 1825.*

SIR,

You have the good fortune to bear a name, which possesses a hereditary claim upon the respect and gratitude of Irishmen. It is imperishably associated with the only few sunny days, that, for centuries, brightened the horizon of our unfortunate country. That you inherit more than the mere name of your venerated father, I am inclined to believe. The commanding powers of his intellect, the diamond sparkling of his wit, the indomitable energies of his spirit, and the resistless tide of his eloquence, it were vain to expect; but I do hope, that the unsullied mantle of his integrity, his benevolence, and his patriotism, has descended upon his son, and will be preserved without a stain. As the foundation of this hope, I have rejoiced to behold you take a deep and generous interest in every thing connected with the improvement or the sorrows of your countrymen. To a heart uncontaminated by the cold and selfish maxims of the world, nothing can be more depressing than the squalid poverty and utter destitution, that so often meet the eye in our fair and fertile island. Whilst, in numerous instances, the vigorous arm of manhood becomes nerveless, from hopeless inactivity, and the feeble voice of infancy and age pleads in vain for the meanest sustenance of nature—we instantly conclude, that such things are at variance with

the designs of a gracious Providence; that they have been produced by the folly or the wickedness of man; and that they may assuredly be remedied by his wisdom and virtue. These are amiable feelings, and I should despise the man that did not frequently indulge them; but, at the same time, it accords with our experience, that there are no cases in which we are so liable to be deceived, as those in which our sympathy interferes with our judgment. The suffering is immediate and affecting; a generous impulse prompts us to relieve it; and we scorn the cold and tedious calculations of remote consequences. Hence, the multitude of Utopian schemes for promoting the perfectibility and happiness of man, that have amused benevolent persons for a season, and passed away "like the baseless fabric of a vision;" or have been remembered only for producing results, directly the reverse of those that were anticipated.

Of all the objects of benevolence, none has more completely occupied the minds, or more frequently baffled the calculations of legislators and philosophers, than the support of the Poor. The truth is, the great machine of society is too vast in its frame, and too complicated in its movements, to be thoroughly comprehended as a whole, by the understanding of man; and hence, chiefly, the comparative failure of all the plans hitherto adopted. Judging from particular facts, and deducing general conclusions from partial experiments, not duly considering the combined results of a series of causes and effects, laws have too often been extended to a whole nation, which, though applicable to a part, have been at utter variance with the habits and interests of the people at large. I am satisfied that some mistake of this kind, operating upon a benevolent nature, has led you to propose the Bill, of which you have given notice, for meliorating the condition of the Poor of Ireland. The temporary success of some partial experiment in your own vicinity, brought about, in all probability, more by the energy and influence of the persons directing it, than by the wisdom or efficiency of the plan upon which it is founded, seems to have led you into the error of conceiving, that, even under circumstances and a management totally different, the same results would continue to be produced. Added to this, you seem to imagine that you have a practical confirmation of the soundness of your views, in the modified Poor Laws of Scotland, that have hitherto produced good, rather than evil. Now, although I cordially join with you in feeling upon this important subject, and although I honour that kindness of nature that, I am persuaded, has induced you to bring your proposition before Parliament, I am compelled to differ from you, *toto cælo*, both with regard to the wisdom and the results of your plan.

Sir, you are about to introduce a measure respecting Ireland, of infinitely greater importance than any other, which could claim the attention of Parliament. It is not a question affecting, exclusively, any religious sect or political party, any peculiar profession or pursuit, any distinct class or order of men in society. It embraces all these; from the highest Peer to the lowest Pauper. Nay more: it

aims at a mighty revolution in the whole social system; trenching upon rights, and conferring privileges; and utterly changing, both in feeling and in fact, many of the most important relations which man bears to man. Nor would it stop even here. Generations yet unborn might have cause to bless or to execrate its author; and the latest posterity would feel its effects. Have you seriously and deliberately considered these things? Have you consulted the venerable Fathers of Parliament, such as Newport, and Tierney, and Parnell? Have you sought instruction from the vigorous and liberal minds of Canning, and Robinson, and Mackintosh, and Brougham? Have you reflected, that all the standard Political Economists, of all countries, are directly arrayed against you, such as Montesquieu, Smith, Malthus, Townsend, and Ricardo? If you have not duly reflected upon the stupendous consequences that may spring from such a measure; if you have not consulted these sage advisers; if you have not studied these high authorities, I trust you will not consider it less conformable to true wisdom, than it is becoming the diffidence of youth and inexperience, to pause in a career, in which you may be so aided by a benevolent but uncalculating sympathy, as to carry an object, that may prove disastrous to your country.

But, you only propose it, you allege, as an *Experiment*. What! try experiments in Legislation! It may be very well to try experiments upon your own estate, where you have the reins in your own hand, and where you can curb the unruly at your pleasure. But it is not just so safe to experiment with perhaps two millions of people, whom you might find it difficult to bring back from idleness and plenty, enjoyed at the expense of others, to scanty fare, and hard labour. You may easily put the stone in motion upon a declivity, that you would vainly attempt to arrest in its progress. From the very constitution of human nature, men readily fall in with changes conducive to their immediate ease and comfort: but, it has been justly said of all political evil, that the medicine is of much slower operation than the poison—*tardiora remedia quam mala*. All experiments in political economy ought, therefore, to be avoided, unless commenced upon principles indisputable in theory, and supported by facts or analogies. That the introduction of any Form of Poor Laws into Ireland, is thus sanctioned, I think you will find it difficult to prove.

I freely admit, that, as from the constitution of man and human affairs, it can never be expected that "the Poor shall cease out of the land," it seems equally consistent with the designs of Providence, and the feelings of nature, that the affluent should contribute to the support of the destitute and helpless. But, even virtues when carried to an extreme, may produce the same effects as vices. The man who "would give all his goods to feed the poor," without regard to the proper claims of his own family, might be more benevolent in design, but certainly not less mischievous in practice, than the cold and heartless miser. I think, therefore, you will agree with me in admitting it as a sound principle of Legislation, that where any law may affect various interests, no one party should have its feelings ex-

clusively consulted, to the injury of all the rest. That enactment must always be the best, which, fairly balancing interests and rights, produces the largest sum of general good, with the smallest portion of individual privation. In all attempts, therefore, to meliorate the condition of the poor, who are confessedly, in general, the least worthy portion of the community, we should never forget the rights and interests of the industrious and virtuous part of society. I am satisfied, however, that in the subject under consideration, it is altogether unnecessary to enter into calculations respecting the balance of conflicting feelings and privileges; for, I am persuaded, it may be proved, almost to demonstration, that all attempts to legislate in matters of pure benevolence, must defeat the very ends which they are designed to accomplish. The poor and the rich, the idle and the industrious, the worthless and the virtuous, are equally interested in opposing all regulations that would establish a compulsory and odious tax, in the room of kind and voluntary charity.

The lower classes of society are not actuated by those stirring and active principles, that animate the industry, or stimulate the ambition of the middling and better ranks. Born in obscurity, or reduced to it, in most instances, by indolence or vice, they have scarcely any desire to improve their condition. The same wretched hovel shelters successive generations; and the only spring of action, in most cases, is the mere sensation of hunger, or other bodily wants. Were this sole stimulus to action removed, by giving to the lower orders of the Irish, who are proverbially indolent, thoughtless, and improvident, a vested and legal right in the property and industry of all around them, our unfortunate country would, in a very few years, sink into still lower depths of moral and social degradation. Even in prosperous, wealthy, and manufacturing England, the Poor Rates amounting to *seven or eight millions annually*, are considered by every man of sense, to be the greatest bane of the virtue and happiness of the country. From Cornwall to the Tweed, there is not one respectable individual, who is not anxious to see the nuisance abated, or altogether removed. It is diffused through the body politic, like an ingrained and incurable distemper; or rather, it broods like an incubus upon the property and industry of the country, which is only enabled to bear it, by the unparalleled prosperity of manufactures and commerce. And is it a system like this, which you would introduce into Ireland—comparatively poor in all parts, and bankrupt in many? In Ulster, from a pretty general diffusion of manufactures, and habits of industry, we might be able to bear up against it for a few years; but in the south and west, where, in many places, the idle are to the employed, as ten to one, its duration would be very short indeed. As the lean kine of Pharaoh eat up the healthy and well-favoured, the paupers would soon swallow up the rent of the landholders, and every man of enterprise and industry would flee from the scene of desolation. Mr. Martin might devote himself, without interruption, to his benevolent pursuits in the metropolis; as the parish officers would kindly undertake the entire management of his romantic estates in Cunnemara. To the poor, themselves, such a system would be

equally ruinous, in the issue. For a short time, it is true, they might think it a good thing to eat the bread for which others had toiled, and to consume the envied plenty of their superiors; but those immediately above them, would be quickly reduced to their own level; and joining in the plunder of the next grade, they would increase in numbers, and pull down rank after rank, until the whole social fabric would be reduced to one base and miserable level. In such a degraded mass, demoralized in principles, practice, and habits, there would be no source of renovation. They would go on multiplying, like the dogs which were put ashore in the Island of Juan Fernandez, until they had destroyed every thing within their reach, and then they would exercise their passions upon one another. That this is no exaggerated picture, may be justly inferred from the enormous amount, and demoralizing influence of the Poor Rates in England, with all her advantages; where the sentiment of charity is too often converted into hatred, and where the amiable feelings of gratitude are superseded by those of rapacity and insolence.

But you do not intend to adopt the odious system pursued in England: you prefer the modified one of Scotland, where voluntary subscriptions are first collected, and when these are insufficient, a compulsory tax is voted by the parish. This, you seem to think, would wring something from the niggardly and uncharitable, and lessen the burthen of the generous and humane. Now, the plausibility of this argument and the apparent moderation of your plan, are amongst the strongest objections to your proposition; because it will be the more likely to mislead other benevolent persons, as well as yourself. It is, therefore, the more necessary to inquire into the solidity of your reasoning.

With regard to Scotland, and the beneficial results of the Poor Laws in that country, you could scarcely have selected a more unfavourable instance in support of your proposal. You must be aware, that the Poor Laws to which you allude, were established in Scotland, a very short time after the Reformation. The country was at that period but thinly inhabited; nor has it, indeed, at any time, in proportion to its extent and productiveness, supported a population equal to any other portion of the British Empire. A kind of conditional provision was then made for the poor, in lieu of the support which they had been accustomed to receive from the monasteries; but, in reality, the enactment slept for ages, as a dead law in the Statute Book. It is true that in certain seasons of distress, and especially in the disastrous years of 1816 and 1817, attempts were made to bring the law into general operation. These attempts, with the exception of a very few instances, were foiled by the proverbial prudence of the influential part of the community; who, with the example of England before their eyes, did not choose to lay upon their property, and to entail upon their posterity, the odious burthen of an increasing and pernicious tax. I believe it would puzzle you to find in all Scotland, fifty parishes, in which the Poor Rates have been at any time levied, or even one, in which they were continued for any considerable length of time. The fact is, the Scotch have long been an

educated, virtuous, and persevering people; and whenever they did not find profitable employment at home, they carried their talents and their industry into better markets, in every part of the world. Hence, unless in peculiar seasons of scarcity or want of employment, in which voluntary benevolence was almost always able to meet the emergency, the operation of the poor laws was never required; and, therefore, so far as Scotland is concerned, the argument must fall to the ground. Were it even, however, as conformable to fact, as it is contrary to it, that Poor Laws had been regularly in force in that country, the comparison would not hold good, with regard to Ireland, which differs from Scotland in the most striking degree, in education, feelings, habits, and institutions.

The only show of argument that I have ever seen used in favour of permanent and compulsory Poor Rates, is that before alluded to, viz.: that *all* contribute, in proportion to their means, to the support of the indigent, instead of leaving the whole burthen upon the generous and conscientious. This argument is specious; and as it accords with our contempt of a penurious and uncharitable spirit, always produces some effect. Now, it is an admitted principle of political economy, that population multiplies with the means of sustenance; and I believe it is scarcely less acknowledged, that pauperism increases in proportion to the liberality with which it is relieved. It is the nature of all animals to prefer ease and plenty, to toil and want. "Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Where there is food, there will be mouths to eat it: where men can live without the sweat of their brow, they will not exhaust themselves with anxiety and labour. I have witnessed many illustrations of these principles on a small scale; and without variation of result. A very striking instance occurs to my mind at this moment. A town, in this county, situated in the midst of a most beautiful and fertile country, had the good fortune, as it was thought, to obtain several bequests for the benefit of the poor, and the additional happiness of having in its immediate vicinity, a most liberal and humane nobility and gentry. Large sums were periodically expended, on fuel, food, and clothing. In short, the poor were made so comfortable, that the praise of the good town was heard from every tongue. When this system had been in operation for a few years, I happened to be on a visit to a friend, in the very place. I was much astonished to observe a vast number of beggars loitering about the corners, or crawling along the streets. On asking my friend for an explanation of a circumstance so unexpected, he replied—"We have made idlers by our bounties, and beggars by our alms: had we thrown away the money which we have distributed, it would have been better disposed of: we must utterly change our system: we have been judging from our own wishes and feelings, rather than from human nature." The system has been much changed; but the effects of the primary error have not yet been done away; and probably never will be altogether removed. Now, this is but one instance out of thousands which might be adduced, to prove that benevolence often defeats its own object, by augmenting the very evil which it endeavours to remove. And such,

I am confident, from an intimate knowledge of the indigent classes in this country, would be the inevitable consequences of a permanent and compulsory provision for the poor. Where then, to any party, would be the eventual gain of wringing a reluctant contribution from a few selfish mortals, which would, in a very little time, fall far short of supporting the increase of pauperism, occasioned by a visionary and impolitic system? It could give no pleasure to any being but a demon, to deprive another of that which he values, when the deprivation can produce no possible good to any creature. If we add to this consideration, that the increase of pauperism, would not be the only evil result from the establishment of Poor Rates, but that it would bring in its train all the degrading vices too often attendant upon extreme poverty, we would have no great reason to boast of our serving the ends of humanity, by violating the miser's hoard. To him it is only useless; to those who would share in it, under such circumstances, it would be pernicious. Besides this, the argument is bottomed upon an error, with respect to the number of those who refuse to contribute voluntarily, to the support of the Poor. From the customs of society, the feelings of nature, and the powerful influence of public opinion, there are but very few, indeed, who do not, in some way, lend assistance to the indigent. The amount and mode, will necessarily vary according to dispositions and views; but in the very town in which I write, there is a practical proof, that the interests of the poor will not be neglected, nor any intolerable burthen thrown upon the humane, because there are no compulsory laws to amerce the niggardly and hard hearted. Belfast has long been distinguished by numerous institutions, for the relief of every kind of misfortune, which have been most liberally supported by the voluntary contributions, and admirably regulated by the gratuitous attention of the inhabitants; and I can safely assert, that of a large population, there could not be found five individuals possessing the means, who have disgraced themselves by refusing subscriptions to the principal charities. Every thing is conducted in a spirit of exemplary kindness and discretion. There are no partialities, no misapplication of funds, no intriguing for situations, no serving of private interests. The public are satisfied, that their Benefactions are well and wisely applied; the natural and proper tone of society is preserved; the affluent contribute cheerfully and benevolently, viewing the distressed as unfortunate brethren, and not as thankless nuisances; and the poor receive with gratitude and respect, not as a right but as a boon, what is kindly and liberally given. Charity is made the handmaid of industry and moral improvement: the profligate are restrained and the virtuous encouraged; and even in the midst of alms, the spirit of independence is not altogether lost; whilst the miserable increase of pauperism, is effectually prevented. Notwithstanding all our Irish failings, I am willing to stake both my character and cause, upon the comparison of Belfast with any town of equal population in the sister island, that is under the full operation of the heartless and degrading system of the English Poor Rates.

But I have heard it urged, that the introduction of poor laws



would bring home the absentee proprietors, and cause them to spend their time and their money amongst their tenantry, and in the improvement of their country. "This is a consummation devoutly to be wished;" and were I convinced that it would be the result of the poor-rates, I would consider it, undoubtedly, as at least some sort of counterpoise to the crying evils of the system. I am persuaded, however, that although it might produce a temporary mitigation of suffering, it would eventually increase the disease. Where there is no legal power to compel men to work, hunger is often the only stimulus to exertion. Remove that, by giving a *certainty* of support, even to the idle and the profligate, and such characters will soon multiply in the land. If their families *must* be supported by others, they will give themselves little concern on the subject. Having a mortgage upon the exertions and property of their neighbours, why need they toil and sweat? Oh! but industry is a part of your plan: you will cause them to work, and give a portion of the Poor Rates perhaps as wages. I should like to see a landlord superintending the improvement of his estate with such labourers. All certain of a support; the skilled and careful receiving no more than the useless and the lazy; all working with reluctance, and without interest; many sulky and insolent; the kindest feelings would not be likely to subsist between the parties, nor would the proprietor be very grateful to those legislators who pretended to be more interested about his prosperity than he was himself. Suppose, however, that the business should go on, for a few years, with compulsion on both sides, amidst hatred, and wrangling, and discontent, improvement must come to an end some time; and the landlord, looking for some kind of return for his annoyances, and expenditure, and want of comfort, would naturally desire to manage his improved property with fewer hands than had to be employed in making the improvements. What is to be done with the surplus labourers, and with a crowd of craving children, the offspring of foolish marriages, contracted in consequence of a positive support, in prospect? Why, the landholder must either employ and feed them, or give them food without employment: a pleasant alternative, no doubt, for a man who sees himself surrounded by an idle, and consequently profligate race, whom the laws have fastened upon him, to consume the gifts of his ancestors, the fruits of his own labours, and the inheritance of his children. Would such a system produce resident landlords? Would it not, on the contrary, drive every man of consequence from the country? Would he not rather at once give up his estate to the will and pleasure of the harpies, created by a mistaken benevolence, than have the continued mortification of beholding it devoured before his face? That such would be the necessary result of Poor Rates, amidst the thoughtless, vast, and unemployed population of Ireland, can scarcely be doubted, when we consider, that even in favoured England, with so many sources of employment, the amount of the odious tax often exceeds the whole rental (both houses and lands) of the Parish. It is a notorious fact, that in many parts of that country, from the year 1816 to 1821, several farms lay altogether unoccupied, as the owners could find no tenants who would take them, subject to the Poor Rates,

even when offered *free of rent* ! And is this the system, or one which would inevitably lead to it, that the son of Ireland's dearest Patriot would entail upon his country !

The hurried and desultory manner in which this article is written, in order to introduce so important a subject, as early as possible, to the consideration of the public, necessarily precludes me from illustrating many other obvious and powerful reasons against the measure which you propose. A few of those I shall just mention. It would operate indirectly, as a strong premium to idleness, improvidence, and profligacy ; tend to sever the natural bonds which connect the different classes of society ; dry up the streams of private benevolence ; press with the greatest severity upon the most impoverished districts ; oppress the industrious, for the sake of the idle ; destroy the sympathy of relationship ; and, above all, it would annihilate every feeling of independence, and every chance of improvement amongst the humbler classes of society.

There is one paramount and irreparable evil, however, which it would inflict upon the South and West of Ireland, which ought to be placed full in the view of the country. It seems to be admitted on all hands, that the introduction of capital and manufactures, can alone effect a permanent improvement in the condition of the poor, in those extensive districts. The risk of failure even under present circumstances, has hitherto been deemed so great, that scarcely any man or body of men, has yet ventured on the experiment. But this chance of loss would be magnified into certainty, were capital, on its introduction, subjected to a heavy tax for the maintenance of the poor. There might be some doubt whether the people would work, or whether the manufacture would prosper ; but there can be none, that Poor Rates would be gladly received, and eagerly consumed. Is it possible, that any man enjoying the use of his understanding, would, under such circumstances, invest capital, either in Munster or Connaught ? Your proposed Bill ought really to be denominated " A Bill to prevent the introduction of capital and manufactures into Ireland."

That the really indigent and distressed, have a claim upon the community for support, must be admitted ; but I am persuaded it is the wisest and safest plan, to leave the means of support, to the benevolence and discretion of individuals. This seems to be the order of Nature, and the will of God. And though some cases of hardship must occur under any system, there is more charity in the world than most of persons believe ; and I am confident, that none will be allowed to perish of want, in any community where there are means to relieve them. Even general suffering excites general sympathy ; as was signally proved by the noble generosity of England, to the destitute population of part of our country, in the year 1822.

I earnestly entreat you to *pause* in your course, if you do not altogether *stop*, in order that the sentiments of the country may be taken upon a measure, involving interests so extensive, and consequences so important. I am, Sir, &c.

PHILOPATRIS.